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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KHARTOUM 000091

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

NSC FOR MGAVIN, LETIM
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AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE PASS TO AMEMBASSY MALABO

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SUBJECT: WEST DARFUR WALI PESSIMISTIC ON ELECTIONS, SECURITY

CLASSIFIED BY: Robert Whitehead, Charge d'Affaires; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Abugasim Imam Al-Haj, the Wali of West Darfur, will leave office in April embittered that the Government of Sudan (GOS) has done little to honor its commitments under the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) of 2006 and the Declaration of Commitment to the DPA of 2007, to which he was a signatory. The former leader of the Fur rebel group Sudanese Liberation Army (SLA)/Mother said that along with most Fur in West Darfur, he will not participate in the elections, and admitted he did not even register to vote in 2009. He expressed his disdain for the most recent agreement between Chad and Sudan, predicting it would follow the example of previously-unsuccessful Chad-Sudan agreements and the DPA. Similarly, he doubted that the Doha talks would result in a cease-fire among the remaining non-signatories. As governor for West Darfur, he admitted that insecurity in this region was out of control. However, he blamed the Government of Sudan (GOS) for military escalation with Chad, and also for encouraging local tribes to kidnap international Non-Government Organization (INGO) workers for ransom. End summary.

¶2. (C) Speaking with poloff at the Khartoum home of a Darfuri lawyer on January 31, former rebel leader and Declaration of Commitment (DOC) signatory Abugasim Imam Al-Haj said that he will not participate in the April elections. He said he was certain that if he ran for any office, the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) would find a way to derail his campaign. "Darfur is a political problem that needs a political solution," he grumbled, "But the NCP does not want a solution." He warned that the upcoming elections could aggravate the political situation by decisively tilting the fragile balances of power in each Darfur state towards the NCP, marginalizing the politically-active Fur and opposition voices. Imam accused the Khartoum regime of engaging in "peace talking," but not actively searching out political solutions in Darfur, alleging that the NCP believed political reconciliation to be a threat to its hegemony in Sudan's western region.

¶3. (C) Imam said he holds out little hope for the most recent peace initiative between Chad and Sudan, pointing to the long history of agreements covering the restive border region, signed by the GOS and Government of Chad but not subsequently honored. "They're very clever," Imam said of the NCP, and added, "They want to make Chad think they'll actually change things without changing at all." Of the Chadian Armed Opposition Groups (CAOGs), Imam confirmed his view that on the whole, the CAOGs had retreated from West Darfur to North Darfur, but the GOS would prefer to keep them in reserve, and would not disarm them. Imam accompanied Presidential Advisor Dr. Ghazi Salahuddin on his trip to the Chadian capital in November 2009, but claimed t he was not brought along to engage Chadian officials in substantive discussions. "They used me as a cover. He (Ghazi) froze me out of meetings, and I did not travel with him again."

14. (C) In West Darfur, Imam sees the NCP as so narrowly focused on funding its security services that priority issues such as health and education are "completely ignored." Funding for the security forces of the Ministry of Defense, National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS), and the Ministry of the Interior is divided in Khartoum, giving Imam administrative control of little more than the El Geneina traffic police. Imam criticized the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and its stance towards Chad, saying SAF frequently relies on uncorroborated intelligence on Chadian military and rebel positions, leading the Ministry of Defense in Khartoum to order preemptive bombings of border areas with little regard for civilian casualties or actual Chadian positions. Imam alleged that the wave of kidnappings and hostage-taking attempts in West Darfur in 2009 was directly linked to the heavy presence of NISS in the region. He asserted that NISS has encouraged local Arab tribes to become involved in kidnapping INGO workers as a way to scare the INGOs out of West Darfur, and added that the releases were theatrics organized by NISS in Khartoum.

15. (C) Imam was skeptical that the current talks in Doha would result in any of the non-signatory Darfuri rebel movements signing a peace deal with the government. The absence of Abdul Wahid and any credible Fur representation at the talks has doomed them from the start, and Imam predicted that the Doha talks would end soon. With Khalil Ibrahim and his Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) unable to take and hold any significant territory in Darfur, JEM has become deeper entwined in the political system of Chad while becoming less relevant in Darfur. Imam sees JEM as "Deby's problem," because the multidimensional Zaghawa alliances in Chad

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that provided support for JEM have in turn made Khalil Ibrahim a relevant political figure in N'Djamena. Following recent interneceine clashes within SLA/Abdul Wahid, Imam said that leaders in Nertiti reported that up to 80,000 IDPs have fled from Jebel Marra to the Nertiti IDP camp. (Note: These numbers are most likely highly-inflated, and the UN has been unable to ascertain the number of IDPs following the recent clashes. End note.) The collapse of command and control within SLA/Abdul Wahid will most likely spread into West Darfur, Imam added, further muddying the waters with rebel signatories, non-signatories, and ragtag bands of rebels intent on carrying out local vendettas similar to the January 5 killing of SLA/Abdul Wahid commander Abdalla Bakr.

16. (C) Comment: Weak, marginalized and unpopular, Imam took office in 2007 as an NCP ploy to attract Fur supporters away from Abdul Wahid, but the NCP's move proved disastrous. West Darfur remains Sudan's most lawless state, with little of the central administrative control present in restive North and South Darfur, and none of the stable political equilibrium seen in the underdeveloped states of the east. Departing from office following the elections in April, Imam will leave behind him no significant legacy, and will join the ranks of former Fur officials in Darfur who were no match for Khartoum's powerful security apparatus and political guile. From his vantage point of three years in El Geneina, Imam sees no signs that would motivate him or other leading Fur in West Darfur to participate in this year's elections and the subsequent political process. We do not discount that there are some sour grapes behind his bitter remarks. End comment.

WHITEHEAD